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LESSON FROM THE DARDANELLES

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Abstract of

LESSON FROM THE DARDANELLES

On February 19, 1915, a fleet of British and French naval vessels began a bombardment of Turkish forts that guarded the mouth of the Dardanelles: a narrow strait in Turkey, 40 miles in length, that connects the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmora, and offers a navigable channel to the Black Sea and Russia beyond. The bombardment set in motion a chain of events that culminated in a full-blown amphibious invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The invasion did not achieve its objective of enabling the Allied fleet to force the Dardanelles and reach Constantinople. Their effort cost the Allies approximately 265,000 casualties, 46,000 of whom were killed in action or died of wounds or disease.

LESSON FROM THE DARDANELLES analyzes Great Britain's failure in the Dardanelles Campaign and concludes that four fundamental and recurring problems combined to cause the disaster at Gallipoli: an inadequate military strategy; the lack of a sound operational plan; the barriers that exist in communications between political and military leaders; and the pervasive military cultural norm of conditioned obedience.

The paper goes on to argue that conditioned obedience continues as a corroding influence in military society, and to recommend methods for eliminating it.

Lesson from the Dardanelles

On February 19, 1915, a fleet of British and French naval vessels began a bombardment of Turkish forts that guarded the mouth of the Dardanelles: a narrow strait in Turkey, 40 miles in length, that connects the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmora, and offers a navigable channel to the Black Sea and Russia beyond. The bombardment set in motion a chain of events that culminated in a full-blown amphibious invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula. The invasion did not achieve its objective of enabling the Allied fleet to force the Dardanelles and reach Constantinople. Their effort cost the Allies approximately 265,000 casualties, 46,000 of whom "were killed in action or died of wounds or disease." In many ways, the British experience in Gallipoli parallels America's experience in Vietnam. Allied military leaders in the First World War didn't recognize how, fundamentally, the nature of war had changed. While this change demanded new strategies and tactics, they insisted on fighting with old, familiar methods. Political leaders in Britain were divided over the strategy that would best serve their interests; as a result, their Dardanelles policy developed piecemeal, and they allowed sunk costs and fear of loss of prestige abroad and adverse political consequences at home to drive them to poor decisions. The campaign's cost, in national blood and treasure, was perceived at the time to be far higher than the value of its objective; public reaction to failure to achieve the objective, and to the price the nation paid, was violent. And, for many years thereafter, the word "Gallipoli" evoked such passionate reaction in all those shocked at the waste and futility of war, that it clouded the facts and obscured the campaign's lessons. Yet, in sifting through the controversy that, even eighty years later, continues to surround the campaign, one can distill a lesson which is unquestionably relevant to military leaders today. Four fundamental and recurring problems combined to cause the disaster at Gallipoli; the military services have since developed programs to address three of the four, but have yet to deal with the most pervasive, and the most enduring.

¹Robert Rhodes James, Gallipoli (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd., 1965), 348.

The first problem that contributed to the failure of the Dardanelles Campaign was the inadequacy of the strategy adopted by Great Britain's political leadership. The decision process by which ground troops from Britain, France and throughout the Dominion were committed to the amphibious invasion of an inhospitable peninsula nearly 3000 miles from the British Isles has been aptly described by one historian as "drift." The process began when Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, raised the concept of a joint military and naval operation in the Dardanelles in the first meeting of the War Council on November 25, 1914, approximately a month after the Turkey entered the War.³ Britain had been at war with Germany since early August. The Western Front had stabilized into a line of "opposing trenches...from the Flanders coast to the Swiss frontiers. The casualties on all sides had been unimaginably terrible."4 Churchill, and others, sought an alternative to this seemingly senseless slaughter in France.⁵ Churchill also sought opportunities to use British naval strength as aggressively as possible to aid the Allied cause.⁶ Without full discussion of the desirability or feasibility of such an operation, the War Council tabled Churchill's proposal when Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, asserted there were "not enough troops available to be diverted to another front."7

The decision was revisited with the coming of the new year. Russian troops in the Caucasus were in danger of being overrun by the Turkish Army. On January 1, 1915, the British ambassador to Russia conveyed a message from Grand Duke Nicholas to Lord Kitchener, asking him to provide "a demonstration of some kind against the Turks elsewhere, either naval or military, . . . which would cause Turks . . . to withdraw some of the forces

²Ibid., 14.

³James, 25.

⁴Ibid., 12.

⁵Jeffrey D. Wallin, By Ships Alone: Churchill and the Dardanelles (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1981), 13.

⁶ Churchill, and his supporters, have maintained that his search for a role for the Navy beyond protecting the home islands from invasion and safeguarding Allied shipping stemmed from a sense of duty. Wallin, 14. Other historians have suggested this search was motivated by personal ambition. See, e.g., James, at 25. There is undoubtedly an element of truth in each view.

⁷James, 25.

now acting against Russia . . . "8 Kitchener still felt he had no troops to spare for an operation in the East and, after a conversation with Churchill, forwarded the telegram to the Admiralty with a request for aid for Russia in the form of a naval demonstration off the Turkish coast.⁹ After consulting the commander of the British Fleet in the Aegean by telegram, Churchill proposed to the War Council that, rather than provide the requested demonstration, the Navy should attempt to force the Dardanelles by ships alone. 10 As proposed, the operation involved "a slow, methodical, piecemeal destruction of the outer forts, followed by a sweeping of the mines and an advance to the Narrows."11 The advantages of such a plan were seductive; its successful execution could: open a desperately needed sea route to Russia to move arms in and grain out; draw nonaligned Balkan states into the war on the Allied side; expose the German flank; and expose Constantinople to naval gunfire and drive Turkey out of the war. 12 A naval operation seemed particularly attractive because it would primarily rely on older, *Majestic* and Canopus class warships, which were not needed to support the Grand Fleet, ¹³ and because, if the attack proved unsuccessful, it could so easily be called off. 14 But the plan had significant drawbacks as well. It flew in the face of established naval doctrine that "condemned the attack on forts by ships unaided by any military force."¹⁵ It relied on two optimistic assumptions: that the fleet's presence off Constantinople would cause Turkey to capitulate; and that the operation would impress Greece and the Balkan states sufficiently to cause them to set aside traditional rivalries and cooperate in the Allied cause. It also ignored two critical factors: that the Turkish Army had 200,000 soldiers in and around Constantinople ready to defend the capital; 16 and that the British were having serious trouble supplying their own troops with arms and ammunition. They had none to spare for Russia.

⁸Sir George Buchanan, British Ambassador in Petrograd, quoted in Wallin, 52.

⁹Wallin, 52.

¹⁰Ibid., 55, 56, 70.

¹¹Ibid., 101.

¹²Ibid., 19, 68.

¹³Ibid., 55.

¹⁴Ibid., 70, 92, 95.

¹⁵Dardanelles Commission, First Report& Supplement, Cd. 8490 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1917), 29.

¹⁶Sir Gerald Ellison, *The Perils of Amateur Strategy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1926) 13.

The Dardanelles Commission's *First Report* summarized how, what was originally conceived as a simple naval demonstration off the Turkish coast, evolved into a full blown amphibious assault.

The necessity for employing a large military force became daily more apparent. The idea of a purely naval operation was gradually dropped. The prestige argument grew in importance.¹⁷ It does not appear that either the Cabinet or the War Council ever definitely discussed and deliberately changed the policy. General Callwell [Director of Military Operations for the War Office] says that it would be very difficult to assign any date at which the change took place. "We drifted," he said, "into the big military attack."

In modern parlance, the Commission was describing "mission creep" or, perhaps more accurately, when referring to the Dardanelles Campaign, "mission leap." Concerned that the Navy might need undetermined assistance in forcing the Straits, Great Britain's Secretary of State for War, with the approval of the War Council, dispatched 70,000 troops to the Aegean without giving their commander clear guidance on how the troops would be used. When the naval operation ran into difficulties, these same leaders allowed the on-scene naval and military commanders to make a decision to substitute a joint operation for a purely naval operation, thus abandoning the planned sequel of terminating the naval operation if it proved too difficult. Once ground troops were committed, even after it became apparent that the difficulties of the operation had been grossly underestimated and its continuation would sap the nation's resources, the fear of loss of prestige and influence in the East held British policy hostage. As they drifted toward disaster, Britain's leaders lost sight of the need to reconcile

¹⁷As detailed in the Commission Report: "... anyone conversant with Eastern affairs would have predicted, in January, 1915, that if a serious attack on the Dardanelles was made and it failed, the result would be to give a shattering blow to British prestige and influence throughout the East...."

[&]quot;Lord Kitchener, as might naturally be expected from his long Eastern experience, was more especially impressed with the harm which would ensue from failure, but although he and others realised the inevitable risk which would have to be run, they thought, in the first instance, that any serious loss of prestige could, in any case, be avoided by desisting from the attack if, after some experience had been gained, the prospect of success was greatly diminished. A great distinction was made between the withdrawal of the fleet and the evacuation by a military force once it had been landed "

[&]quot;... when the time came for applying the principles enunciated above, the argument based upon the loss of prestige, which would result from the acknowledgment of a partial failure, exercised so predominant an influence as practically to both nullify the intentions which had been originally formed and to obliterate the recollection of the considerations which were advanced prior to any definite action having been taken." Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement, 23-24.

¹⁸James, 52.

¹⁹Ibid., 67.

²⁰Dardanelles Commission, Final Report, Cmd. 371 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919), 25.

the ends they sought with the means at their disposal. Though stretched to the limit of their resources and committed to supporting the French on the Western Front, they allowed themselves to become embroiled in a major operation in Turkey. "The question of whether the British Empire had adequate resources to undertake both these operations simultaneously was not examined; the relative importance of each operation was not determined..."²¹ The result was disastrous: "a major campaign run with resources appropriate to a subsidiary operation."²²

The second problem that contributed to the failure of the Dardanelles Campaign was the lack of a sound operational plan, which should have linked the political leaders' strategy with the tactics of the soldier on the ground. The lack of a sound plan was rooted in the rudderless strategy of the political leaders, but it was compounded by the dominant personality of the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener,²³ and by the departure, at the outbreak of the war, of several key members of the British General Staff for commands in the field.²⁴ Lord Kitchener, unfamiliar with a reorganization of the War Office that had taken place while he served abroad,²⁵ undermined the General Staff system by centralizing the administration of the War Office in his own hands.²⁶ The General Staff, the body ordinarily tasked with planning major operations, no longer performed its normal function, in large measure, as the Director of Military Operations explained, "because it was never consulted."²⁷

The consequences were dire. Sir Ian Hamilton was informed on March 12, 1915--the day before he sailed for the Aegean--that he was to command a force of 70,000 men in the Dardanelles.²⁸ The General Staff had developed no plan for the operation; indeed, "[t]he Chief of the Imperial General Staff had no idea what was on Kitchener's mind" until he joined

²¹James, 69.

²²Ibid., 70.

²³Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement, 13.

²⁴Ibid., 12.

²⁵James, 20.

²⁶Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement, 13.

²⁷*Ibid*.. 13.

²⁸James, 52, 54.

Kitchener's discussion with Hamilton on the 12th.²⁹ Hamilton sailed for the Dardanelles without an accurate map of the Gallipoli Peninsula.³⁰ His Chief of Staff requested information on the area from the War Office Intelligence Branch, and was given "an out-of-date text-book on the Turkish Army and two small guidebooks on western Turkey."³¹ Hamilton was able to obtain "the outline of a plan which had been worked out by the Greek General Staff for an attack on the Dardanelles,"³² which estimated a force of 150,000 men would be needed.³³ He was not supplied with "detailed reports on the Dardanelles defenses" or "important data concerning the topography of the Gallipoli Peninsula and the Asiatic shore," both of which had been forwarded to the War Office "since 1911 by successive military attaches at Constantinople and vice-consuls at Chanak" but were evidently "permitted to moulder in some dark recess of the War Office."³⁴ Most critically, he was not given any clear sense of his mission.

The lack of planning translated to chaos on the ground. Serious lift shortages, aggravated by Lord Kitchener's vacillation on the availability of the 29th Division, plagued the operation and caused undesirable delay. Lemnos, a Greek island chosen as a basing area for the troops as they were assembled, proved unsuitable because of an inadequate fresh water supply and non-existent port facilities. Troops sent to Lemnos were forced to live on their transports, landing only for exercise, until authorities decided to shift the staging area back to Alexandria. The force experienced serious combat loading problems. Men, arms, supplies and transports were assembled rapidly, with no clear sense of how they would be employed and no special loading instructions developed to support their deployment. As a consequence, divisions found that men sailed on one ship, vehicles on another and horses on a third; that

²⁹Ibid., 53.

³⁰Dardanelles Commission, Final Report, 10.

³¹James, 53.

³²Dardanelles Commission, Final Report, 10.

³³James, 52.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 53-54.

³⁵Wallin, 118.

³⁶Dardanelles Commission, Final Report, 15-16.

stores were not properly stowed; that critical equipment arrived late; and that much equipment that was quite useless was transported.³⁷ Logistics problems grew to nightmare proportions. Ammunition shortages were so critical that Sir Ian Hamilton communicated to Lord Kitchener in mid-May, approximately three weeks after his initial landing, that, if given a liberal supply of high explosive ammunition, he could advance with half the loss of life that he otherwise anticipated.³⁸ Drinking water supplies proved impossible to sustain. During a critical battle at Anzac, all ranks were reduced to a pint a day while they fought in 90 degree heat in difficult terrain.³⁹ The operational commander couldn't commit reserves to reinforce his effort at a critical juncture, because he couldn't supply them with water. At Suvla, problems getting water from ships to the beach and from the beach to troops, for lack of adequate lighters and receptacles, caused a breakdown in discipline, as troops pricked holes in the hoses from the lighters to quench their thirst.⁴⁰ Logistics problems increased as the troops advanced, as food, water and ammunition had to be moved by mule through difficult country, often under hostile fire.⁴¹

Even aside from sustainment problems, lack of planning had left Hamilton's operational design fatally flawed. His mission was to assist the Navy in forcing the Dardanelles and pressing on to Constantinople. The War Council calculated that the mere presence of the fleet in the Sea of Marmora would win an important political victory: that it would open a sea route to Russia, draw in allies and demoralize the Turks. For this reason, a strong argument could be made that the enemy's operational center of gravity in the Dardanelles Campaign was the system of defenses in the Straits: the forts, the howitzers, and particularly the mines⁴² If the

³⁷*Ibid.*, 16-17.

³⁸Ibid., 22. But see, Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1990), at 150-1, wherein the authors argue it was grenades and mortars, not artillery and high explosive ammunition, which were called for under conditions that prevailed on the Peninsula. The point is valid nevertheless: poor planning caused a shortage of critical weapons and, arguably, a misapprehension as to what type of weapons were most needed.

³⁹Dardanelles Commission, Final Report, 62.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 65.

⁴¹ Ibid., 46.

⁴²This argument has in fact been persuasively advanced in Professor Wallin's book, By Ships Alone: Churchill and the Dardanelles.

fleet could force its way past these defenses, it could cut the lines of communication to the Gallipoli Peninsula and render an invasion unnecessary. Yet as soon as Hamilton agreed to invade the Peninsula, the commander of the Aegean fleet, who had lost his appetite for battle after "losses of only 61 British lives and a few old, otherwise useless battleships," 43 assumed a supporting role in the invasion and made no further attempt to force the Straits. 44 And, rather than insisting that available destroyers be refitted as minesweepers and selecting a point of main attack at which the enemy might be vulnerable, 45 Hamilton planned and executed an amphibious assault into the teeth of the enemy's strength.

The odds were stacked against success. The Turks had been warned of the probability of attack by the bombardment of the forts and the massing of troops, which gave Hamilton's forces no opportunity to achieve operational surprise. Acconstrained in his ability to maneuver by restricted space on the beaches and the existing Turkish defenses, he had to divide his force and land at several sites. Poor intelligence caused him to misjudge the enemy's strengths and his own weaknesses and vulnerabilities: he grossly underestimated the size of the enemy force and its abilities, the strength of the Turks' defenses, the difficulty of the terrain, the casualties his own force would sustain in landing, and the problems of logistics. He'd assumed his troops would gain high ground in the first rush of landing; when they failed, he had no branch or sequel built into the plan, and the resultant delay gave the Turks time to reinforce their defenses. He failed in the initial converging attack that was intended to concentrate his forces. He failed to impress upon his subordinates the vital importance of coordinated action in a critical subsequent engagement at Suvla; when they manifested that they didn't understand his intent, he failed to tighten the control he exerted over the

⁴³Wallin, 195.

⁴⁴James, 69.

⁴⁵To be fair to Hamilton, it must be noted that he could not be expected to have sufficient mastery of naval matters to recognize this as an option, and that the naval commander was not subject to his command. Once the Army arrived on scene, there was a unity of command problem that, left unresolved, contributed significantly to the confusion concerning the Navy's role when the invasion began.

⁴⁶Dardanelles Commission, Final Report, 21.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁸Ibid, 22.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 19.

operation.⁵⁰ Most importantly, he failed in his obligation as a commander to critically assess his situation, and to revise his operational plan as he received new information. In the end, he found his forces perched precariously on the fringe of the beach, outnumbered, vulnerable to enemy fire, and unable to advance.

The third problem that contributed to the failure of the Dardanelles Campaign was the inability of political and military leaders to communicate effectively. In the aftermath of the campaign, the King appointed a commission, "for the purpose of inquiring into the origin, inception, and conduct of operations of war in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli "51 The Commission took testimony from the War Council members and the Council's military experts, trying to identify how the Dardanelles Campaign was conceived and why the Council determined to go forward with it. The War Council was a subcommittee of the Cabinet, formed in November, 1914, when it became obvious that the full, 22-member Cabinet was too numerous to control effectively the conduct of the war. It consisted of the Prime Minister (Mr. Henry Asquith), the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. David Lloyd George), the Secretary of State for War (Lord Kitchener), the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Sir Edward Grey), the Secretary of State for India (the Marquis of Crewe), and the First Lord of the Admiralty (Mr. Winston Churchill). Mr. Arthur Balfour [a member of the Opposition], though not a member of the Cabinet, was usually invited to attend. The Chief of the General Staff for the War Office (Lieutenant-General Sir James Wolfe Murray), the First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir John Fisher), and Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, who did not occupy any official position at the Admiralty but was regularly consulted by the First Lord and First Sea Lord, attended War Council meetings as military experts. "It was the [War] Council, and not the united Cabinet, which finally decided the most important matters [in prosecuting the war], and gave effect to its decisions without necessarily waiting for any expression of assent or dissent

from the Cabinet."52

⁵⁰Cohen and Gooch, 141.

⁵¹Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement, 1.

⁵²Great Britain Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement, Cd. 8490 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1917), 4-6.

In the testimony taken by the Commission, there was a fundamental disagreement about the military experts' role in the War Council and, thus, about the extent of their responsibility for the Council's decision to prosecute the Dardanelles Campaign. Political leaders felt that the military leaders had been included fully in the decision process: they were present at War Council meetings while the Dardanelles strategy was developed, and it was reasonable to infer that, if they remained silent while Lord Kitchener and Mr. Churchill advanced a position, they agreed with the position. Military leaders took a radically different view. To a man they maintained that they were not members of the War Council; they were, instead, experts who were there to give an opinion only if called upon. Lieutenant-General Sir James Wolfe Murray, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, testified: that he viewed his role at War Council as that of a staff officer only; that he did not feel called upon to express any independent opinion unless expressly asked to do so; and that he was never asked.⁵³ Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson, when asked whether he would have considered it his duty to speak up in the War Council if the First Lord expounded the naval view and he did not agree, answered: "Probably not, unless I was asked. I was there to help the First Lord." When asked whether he was ever asked, he replied: "No."⁵⁴ Admiral Sir John Fisher, First Sea Lord, insisted: "I was not a member of the War Council, nor was Sir Arthur Wilson, nor Sir James Wolfe Murray We were the experts there who were to open our mouths when told to do so Nothing else."⁵⁵ When a Commission member pointed out to him that it was very difficult to carry on any consultation on that basis, Lord Fisher said that he was there to be loyal to his chief, that he was not to contradict him, and that the only alternative left for him was to hold his tongue, though he dissented, or resign.⁵⁶

The story of the schism between political and military leaders in the aftermath of the Dardanelles Campaign's failure has remained one of the most persistent parts of the campaign's legacy, but one that has been generally misunderstood. Commentators have

⁵³Ibid., 6.

⁵⁴Ibid., 7.

^{55[}bid.

⁵⁶Ibid., 8.

generally fallen into two groups. One group has maintained that the Dardanelles Campaign is just the type of disaster that befalls a nation when political leaders overrule military experts in developing military strategy. The other group has seen the military leaders' testimony to the Commission as dishonorable and self-serving attempts to disassociate themselves from the role they played in developing a strategy that failed. The truth is somewhat less sinister, and somewhat more distressing. Thought it is impossible to rule out the influence of self interest entirely, an objective review of the testimony summarized in the Commission's report leads a modern reader, as it led the Commission, to the conclusion that: "The functions of the experts were, to a great extent, differently understood by the experts themselves and the Ministerial members of the Council." 57

The Commission found that the only grounds for objection that Lord Fisher articulated to political leaders while the operation was being contemplated were that a joint military and naval operation would have a better chance of success and, absent a joint operation in the Dardanelles, the naval assets could be used to better advantage elsewhere. He did not predict that the operation would fail, or articulate the grounds for his instinctive misgivings. The Commission further found that the attitude adopted by Lord Fisher and Sir Arthur Wilson was dictated by a mistaken sense of duty: that an official has a duty "to state fully to the head of his department and, should any proper occasion arise, to other members of the Ministry, what are the nature of his views..." The Commission concluded that the Ministers should have asked the experts to give their views, and that Churchill should "have insisted on their doing so, in order that the Ministerial members might be placed in full possession of all the arguments for and against the enterprise..."

The Commission's conclusions were accurate as far as they went, but they missed an important issue. Fundamentally, the political and military leaders did not understand each other. They came from different worlds. The embraced different values. They developed and

⁵⁷Ibid., 10.

⁵⁸Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement, 20-21.

⁵⁹Ibid., 28.

⁶⁰Ibid.

prized different talents and skills. The gap was widest, and the criticism of the failure has been most damning, in the relationship between Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, and Sir John Fisher, First Sea Lord. In early 1915, Churchill was 40 years old. Son of a prominent family, educated at Harrow School and the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, Churchill had spent his life in the public eye. After brief stints as soldier and journalist, he won a hard-fought election to the House of Commons at the age of 25.61 He was raised up in a parliamentary system, in a tradition of open debate, where the power a person held emanated from his ability to think analytically and to speak persuasively; where rhetoric, in its true classical sense, reigned. Brilliant, ambitious and, perhaps, arrogant, Churchill's intellect, his ideas, and his ability to communicate and persuade, distinguished him from his contemporaries, and brought him to prominence in the Cabinet at the age of 37 at the most perilous time in his country's history.

Sir John Fisher was more than 30 years Churchill's senior. He escaped poverty through a fortunate appointment as a naval cadet at the age of 13, and been in naval service 60 years by 1915. The Navy he entered was one of absolute and brutal discipline; on his first day aboard ship, he saw eight men flogged.⁶² He was known for the remarkable reforms he'd successfully implemented in the Navy in his initial stint as First Sea Lord: modernization of the fleet; re-organization of the reserve; and creation of a modern naval academy.⁶³ He was also known for his piety, his impudent wit at Court, his inability to brook opposition, and his autocratic style as a commander.⁶⁴ He lacked confidence in his speaking abilities; in his lifetime, he gave two public speeches.⁶⁵

Fisher and Churchill liked and respected one another, but they didn't speak the same language. Fisher told the Dardanelles Commission that he was *instinctively against* [emphasis

⁶¹William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory, 1874-1932* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1983), 91-94, 149-163, 184-5, 329-331.

⁶²Dudley Barker, Prominent Edwardians (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 16.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 52-62.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 20, 45, 27, 30.

⁶⁵Ibid., 40, 66.

added] the plan to force the Dardanelles by ships alone,⁶⁶ that he felt it was "doomed to failure."⁶⁷ Churchill wasn't focused on instincts; he expected argument supported by facts. On being queried about what contrary advice he'd received from the Admiralty staff before the naval operation was undertaken, he told the Commission:

No one of those who were consulted--there were very few, but they were very important people--ever argued against the practicability. No one ever said, This is a thing which you cannot do,' and showed by practical simple reasons that it could not be done....

In his testimony, Fisher was adamant that he "did not want to have an altercation with his Chief at the Council [He] was my Chief, and it was silence or resignation. "68 When Fisher actually did resign over reinforcements that were sent to the Aegean without his knowledge, "Churchill wasn't perturbed. Fisher had submitted *eight* previous resignations." These resignations were clear indications of a dysfunctional relationship. Fisher's loyalty didn't permit him to confront his chief, and neither his education nor his professional experience in the old, hierarchical, tradition-bound Navy, had prepared him to analyze his misgivings, articulate the grounds for them, and persuade one of Britain's most gifted orators that the course he favored was dangerous. Some of Fisher's discomfort was caused by the conditioned deference for authority, as discussed in the next section, but much of it was caused by his frustration in trying to work in an unfamiliar environment while he lacked the proper tools.

The final problem that contributed to the failure of the Dardanelles Campaign was a deeply ingrained cultural norm of conditioned obedience in Britain's Army and Navy officers. As a group, they shared a sort of unquestioning, uncritical--almost reflexive--deference to authority, which stifled independent thought, interfered with frank communication, and discouraged initiative in the field. The problem manifested itself at every level of military endeavor.

⁶⁶Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement, 50.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁸Ibid., 27.

⁶⁹Manchester, 554.

Conditioned obedience was "the mistaken sense of duty" that, coupled with underdeveloped analytical and communications skills, kept the War Council's military experts reticent in a strategy debate that cried out for their expertise.

Conditioned obedience colored the response given by Vice-Admiral Carden, commander of the fleet in the Aegean, when Churchill cabled to inquire whether he believed the Dardanelles could be forced by the use of ships alone. Carden's answer--that the Straits couldn't "be rushed, but . . . might be forced by extended operations with a large number of ships"--set the campaign in motion. 70 Yet, when asked about his answer, he testified before the Commission: "I had it in my mind [emphasis added] that it was impossible to form a real opinion on the subject until one had destroyed the forts at the entrance, and was able to get inside and actually find out the extent of the gun defences..."71

Conditioned obedience sent Sir Ian Hamilton sailing uncomplainingly to the Aegean with inadequate resources, inadequate intelligence, inadequate guidance and no plan.⁷² Later, in receipt of what he regarded as "peremptory instructions"⁷³ from Lord Kitchener to take the Peninsula, conditioned obedience rendered him either unable to develop or to unable articulate to his superiors an accurate assessment of his situation.

Even at the tactical level, conditioned obedience bedeviled the Allies. In describing the operations at Suvla, Captain Bean, Official Australian Historian, wrote: "The reason for the failure....may be laid bare by future historians, probing unflinchingly for the causes. Many of the Anzac troops....attributed it partly to the senility of the leadership, partly to the inexperience of the troops, but largely to causes which lie deeper in the mentality of the British people. The same respect for established order which caused Kitchener to entrust the enterprise to unsuitable commanders simply because they were senior appeared to render each soldier inactive unless his officer directed, and each officer dumb unless his senior spoke."⁷⁴

⁷⁰Ibid., 16.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 17.

⁷²Cohen and Gooch, 137.

⁷³ Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement, 35.

⁷⁴Captain Bean, quoted in W.D. Puleston, *The Dardanelles Expedition: A Condensed Study* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1927), 149.

Conclusion

Synergy is a popular concept in military operations. The word derives from a biology term and, in the military context, synergy is said to exist when a commander has so well synchronized his force's efforts that the benefit derived from their actions exceeds the sum of the benefits which could be derived from the component actions. Synergy is usually viewed as a positive force.

But "synergy," like "luck," is really a neutral term. And sometimes bad forces or events are linked together inadvertently, and "bad synergy" results. The Dardanelles Campaign was such a case. An inadequate strategy, a lack of planning, failures in communication and officers who shared an uncritical, unrealistic attitude combined synergistically into a first rate fiasco. And the common thread running though every level of this fiasco was military officers who couldn't say "no."

We are not immune from any of the problems that contributed to the Dardanelles Campaign's failures but, as a nation and within the armed forces, we have taken steps to address the first three.

The adequacy of strategy is very much a matter of public interest and debate, and national command authorities answer to a skeptical public that has not forgotten its own Dardanelles experience: the war in Vietnam.

The armed forces have recognized the need for operational planning and have institutionalized the planning process. The process is taught at all levels of professional military education, and personnel in the field practice it daily. Military operations other than war have allowed the armed forces to hone their planning skills in an urgent but non-lethal environment.

Political and military leaders still live in different worlds. They still embrace different values, and develop and prize different skills. The recent drawdown of forces is rendering our military society even more insular. We face a future in which the nation will be led by men and

women who reached adulthood in the Vietnam era. Our survival in the post-Cold War climate depends on our leaders' ability to present a credible front, to understand the policy-making process, and to communicate to national command authorities and Congress what we can contribute. War College offers a unique opportunity to hone the critical skills our leaders will need: to read widely, to think deeply, to develop and defend their ideas; to write and speak clearly. The pity is that not every officer can attend; the shame is that not every officer wants to.

Conditioned obedience in the officer corps is still very much part of our military culture; it pervades all levels of the service and continues to pose real danger. Good leaders don't rely on it; poor leaders use it as a shield.

Despite the development of extensive leadership programs throughout the services, we continue to deliberately imprint this obsolete and corroding value on officer candidates and academy cadets and midshipmen as they enter upon military service. I recently served a tour of duty as an instructor at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. In our faculty orientation session, we were told by an experienced instructor that part of our job was to help cadets "think outside the box." I reflected on my own college experience and was amused; at 19, as a student at a large midwestern university, I didn't even know I was in a box. But as I got to know the cadets, I realized that they were so constrained by rules and regulations that they bumped up against the limits of their box regularly. And I learned that, after a while, many of them get to like the box; that small changes in the established routine unsettle them. Cadets learn quickly that conformity equates to survival and that survival equates to success. This is a dangerous lesson to imprint on our young.

Lest readers think I exaggerate, let me present another example. In April of this year, former Navy Secretary James Webb spoke at the annual conference of the Naval Institute in Annapolis. He received a standing ovation from hundreds of midshipmen who were present, when he chided Navy leaders for "succumbing to political pressures rather than backing their

own." ⁷⁵The reaction of one of the midshipmen was revealing: "The questions I think were brought out pretty bluntly because Mr. Webb inspired in a lot of us the fact that as leaders we should speak up,' said Midshipman Robert Geiger, 20, a sophomore who wants to be a Marine Corps officer. 'You have to understand, it's drilled into us: You follow orders, you follow orders."

I reported to the Naval War College in August, 1995. I was informed that students at the War College attended class in mufti. On inquiring, I was told that College authorities feared that uniforms in the classroom would stifle debate, that juniors would defer to seniors and the goals of the academic session would not be met. I submit that open and honest dialog is not a matter the armed forces can afford to relegate to academia.

In the course of our studies at the War College, we read C.S. Forester's *The General*, an excellent satire of British military leadership in the First World War. The novel centers around a character of mediocre abilities, who parlays a curious (but, some might say, not unfamiliar) mixture of physical prowess, obtuseness, blind obedience, lack of imagination, fearlessness, unquestioning loyalty, devotion to duty, and sheer luck into a rise to the rank of field marshal. Along the way there is significant collateral damage. In a discussion with peers afterward, we hotly debated the value that officers like the protagonist bring to the service. One group held that he was exactly the kind of officer needed at the junior level, but he failed to mature as he rose in rank. The other group held that he was a poor officer from the outset, and that the only difference his rise in rank made was that it extended the magnitude of the damage he could inflict. I suggest, in Biblical terms, that "... whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."77 It is not reasonable to expect that an officer who is recognized and rewarded early in his career for blind obedience will develop a habit of inquiry.

It is long past time to fundamentally re-evaluate the trait that has been the cornerstone of our military training program. Obedience has a place in developing our officer corps, but

⁷⁵Rowan Scarborough, "Webb Keelhauls Navy for Abandoning its Men," *The Washington Times*, 26 April 1996, p. A-1.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Galatians 6:7.

only if it is based on comprehension and trust, rather than on habit and rank. Enlightened leadership requires dialog and mentoring, and programs that emphasize living according to principles rather than subject to rules. We must look as much at a young officer's reasoning as at his or her actions. The wrong action for the right reason may well be preferable to the right action with no thought behind it. We must strive to impose discipline in thought among our junior officers with the same zeal with which we have previously sought to impose discipline in ranks. We must teach them to think independently, to ask questions, even to question authority.

At a recent ethics forum at the War College, a speaker emphasized the obligation of an ethical leader to have the courage to "speak truth to power." I have since heard peers quote his sentiment approvingly on many occasions. I agreed with the speaker, but felt he did not go far enough. Ethical leaders not only need the courage to speak truth to power; they also need the strength to foster an environment where subordinates feel free to speak truth to them.

Change will be slow and painful. The concept of conditioned obedience is thoroughly entrenched in our culture, and there are many who revere it. Implicit in the argument of those who insist on maintaining it is an unfounded assumption that a thinking person is somehow less capable of discipline, of order, or of sacrifice than one who follows blindly. It is an insulting assumption. Thinking people *must* reject it.

Change needs to be synchronized as if it were the most critical military operation. It does no good to push for change at the accession points if the officer corps won't embrace it. It sets new officers up for failure. But change will pay off. We are entering an era in which the face of war is again changing, as it did during the First World War and as it did in the Vietnam era. The near future holds no peer competitor, and it is likely our forces will be employed more frequently in small conflicts and operations other than war. As our forces gain experience in these areas, we can encourage the thinking leaders, throughout our rank structure, to focus their energies on innovation and on adapting to our changing mission.

⁷⁸Name withheld in accordance with War College's non-attribution policy.

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